

Presentation of the 2025 Gilbert Harris Award to Thomas E. Yancey

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Since 1993, the Gilbert Harris Award has been presented annually by PRI in recognition of career excellence in systematic paleontology. The award is named after PRI's founder, who dedicated a major part of his long and distinguished career to systematics. The recipient is a scientist who, through outstanding research in and commitment to the centrality of systematics in paleontology, has made a significant contribution to the science.

This year's recipient is Thomas Yancey, from Texas A&M University. Tom received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, finishing in 1971. He taught for several years at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and then at Idaho State University before taking the position at A&M in 1979.

Tom is a paleontologist and stratigrapher with particular interest in fossil mollusks. Beyond systematic paleontology, he is well known for his work on late Paleozoic and Paleogene paleoecology, sequence stratigraphy, and depositional environments, and on intervals of exceptional preservation like the famous Pennsylvanian Buckhorn Asphalt of Oklahoma, and for his broad and interdisciplinary collaborations with geochemists to shed light on age, diagenesis, and circumstances of deposition of units in the U.S. Gulf Coastal Plain and beyond, in particular surrounding the Cretaceous-Paleocene boundary mass extinction. After years of work on this wide array of topics, Tom returned to systematics full force in the late 1990s and has since published papers on a dizzying array of taxa, including pleurotomaramoid and neritimorph gastropods, coleoids, ammonites, polyplacophorans, rostroconchs, fusulinids, sponges, bryozoans, tube worms, and even diatoms. His first love though is the bivalves of the Carboniferous through Triassic, and he has made major contributions to our understanding of poorly known bivalve groups such as the praecardioids, ramonalinids, and the enigmatic alatoconchids, as well as coauthoring a major synoptic classification of the Bivalvia and a chapter on bivalves for the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*. His most recent body of work concerns the pinnids of the Late Paleozoic, culminating in last year's publication of a monograph in *Bulletins of American Paleontology*, revising the group as a whole and the species of North America.

In all his work, Tom is generous with his collaborators and recognizes the important contributions made by avocational paleontologists, who are often the collectors of the material on which he works. As Tom said in an interview: “Their passion and willingness to collaborate with professionals are invaluable. Without them, many discoveries would remain hidden.”*

Tom retired from teaching in 2022 after 43 years of service at Texas A&M. He says that he is now “focused on full time research on late Paleozoic bivalves”, adding that this kind of systematic work “reveals the complexity of life in Earth’s oceans long before the world we know.”

For all his professional achievement, and especially for his many contributions to systematic paleontology, it is with pleasure and honor that the Paleontological Research Institution presents its 2025 Gilbert Harris Award to Thomas Yancey.

*<https://artsci.tamu.edu/news/2024/11/amateur-naturalist-unearths-giant-fossil-sparking-new-research-for-texas-aandm-geologist.html>